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GRAPHICAL USER INTERFACE AND METHOD RELATED THERETO

TECHNICAL FIELD OF THE INVENTION

The present invention generally relates to dairy farming, and particularly to a graphical user interface and a method related thereto, for enabling a human user to monitor and/or control a computer controlled dairy farm activity such as for instance automated or semi-automated machine milking.

DESCRIPTION OF RELATED ART AND BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

In modern dairy farm industry there are continuous research and development activities in order to improve the efficiency of various activities such as machine milking, which, inter alia, involves increased milk yield, reduced milking time, while still maintaining good udder health. Other activities include feeding, breeding, cleaning and other treatments.

A major trend in this respect is an increased degree of automation of the various activities. For instance, machine milking may be performed by controlling milking robots, more or less manually, or it may even be performed completely automated. In both cases, at least some of monitoring, controlling, regulating, maintaining, trouble shooting, etc., of the milking machine or robot, by a user or operator of the machine, is needed whereby communication between the user and the machine is realized through an input/output means, e.g. a computer screen and a keyboard, a so-called pointing screen, or through more conventional controls such as levers and knobs, of the machine. Very few considerations in respect of designing these controls, and particularly those represented on computer screens, have been taken, which have resulted in poor, often complex, designs. Computer screens often display the information in plain text and various actions are

typically performed by pressing a number, often arbitrary chosen, followed by pressing a "return" button or the like.

A problem in this respect, particularly in relation to advanced complex monitoring and controlling associated with computer controlled communication, but also concerning simpler conventional controls, is that it might be a hazardous task for the user not to make any mistakes in the communication with the machine or when interpreting received information, which in turn may lead to fatal errors in the operation of the machine. The more complex the control means is and the shorter time the human user has available, the higher is the probability for the user to perceive information erroneously and/or perform erroneous actions.

In a dairy farm system, there are some particular concerns that have to be dealt with. Firstly, a dairy farm comprises a particular environment in that it includes living animals. In such an unpredictable or uncontrollable environment emergency situations may arise such as animals getting jammed in a gate or teats getting caught in a teat cup etc. In such circumstances, an activity such as opening a gate or detaching a teat cup is needed to be performed extremely rapidly. The user of the dairy farm system, being under stress, thus performs an action, i.e. the first action that comes to the user's mind which is intuitively believed to be the right action. The risk of faulty actions is in this respect considerable high.

Secondly, the problems are probable to arise for a user which is not familiar with the system such as a substitute or the like or for a user confronting a part of the system which normally is not used, e.g. a part used for infrequent operation and maintenance activities, or the like.

Consequently, in an automated dairy farm there is an urgent need of a graphical user interface for controlling various activities,

which is easy to understand, logical and enables a user to perform an action in an intuitive manner.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

Accordingly, it is an object of the present invention to provide a graphical user interface in a computer controlled dairy farm system such as a machine milking facility, for monitoring and/or controlling said system. Said graphical user interface should be arranged so as to minimize the cognitive burden that the user is exposed to during use of, e.g. communication with, the system, in order to hereby minimize the risk of erroneous actions.

In this respect, it is a further object of the invention to be integratable in existing computer controlled dairy farm systems.

It is yet a further object to provide such an inventive interface for effective, accurate, precise and reliable use of said system.

These objects, among others, are, according to one aspect of the invention, fulfilled by a graphical user interface as claimed in Claim 1.

A further object of the present invention is to provide a method for displaying a graphical user interface in a computer controlled dairy farm system, or part thereof, for communication from the system to a human user and/or from the user to the system.

Consequently, there is according to a second aspect of the present invention provided a method as claimed in Claim 16.

An advantage of the present invention is that it provides for a reliable operation of the computer controlled dairy farm system.

Further characteristics of the invention, and advantages thereof, will be evident from the following detailed description of

embodiments of the invention, which are shown in the accompanying drawings.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

The present invention will become more fully understood from the detailed description of embodiments of the present invention given hereinbelow and the accompanying Figs. 1-3 which are given by way of illustration only, and thus are not limitative of the invention.

Fig. 1 displays schematically a graphical user interface according to a first embodiment of the present invention.

Fig. 2 illustrates schematically a graphical user interface according to a second embodiment of the present invention.

Fig. 3 illustrates schematically a graphical user interface according to a third embodiment of the present invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF EMBODIMENTS

In the following description, for purposes of explanation and not limitation, specific details are set fourth, such as particular hardware, applications, techniques, etc. in order to provide a thorough understanding of the present invention. However, it will be apparent to one skilled in the art that the present invention may be practiced in other embodiments that depart from these specific details. In other instances, detailed descriptions of well-known methods, protocols, apparatuses, and circuits are omitted so as not to obscure the description of the present invention with unnecessary details.

While the present invention is to be employed for communication between a human user and an arbitrary computerized dairy farm system, it will mainly be described in relation to a milking

machine system, which typically involves, for each animal milking unit, a clawpiece and a cluster of four teat cups connected to the clawpiece. Each teat cup has a rigid shell and an internal flexible liner. This liner has a topmost mouthpiece and a body part inside the shell body. The liner extends through the bottom of the shell body as a short milk tube. This tube is connected to clawpiece and thence, by way of a long milk tube, to a source of steady vacuum. An annular space, between the teat cup shell and the teat cup liner, is connected to the clawpiece by a pulse tube and thence to a source of pulsating vacuum. A milk meter may be attached to the downstream end of the long milk tube.

Alternatively, the clawpiece and the cluster may be dispensed with, whereby each teat cup is connected directly to a respective long milk tube, and each long milk tube is connected to the vacuum source.

For milking, the four teat cups are placed around the animal's teats, the liner mouthpiece of each teat cup being fitted over the respective teat. The teat cups are held in position during the milking by adhesion due to the steady vacuum applied for the milking. The pulsating vacuum applied between the teat cup liner and shell causes the liner body to dilate and contract again, thus promoting the flow of milk by simulating suckling. After completion of the milking, the teat cup cluster is removed from the animal's teats, either manually or by automatic means.

The present invention comprises a design of a graphical user interface and interactions through said interface that employs the principle of natural mapping.

Mapping is a technical term, which refers the relation between two things. In the present case, the graphical user interface and the automated dairy farm system, e.g., the milking machine. Natural mapping means that this relation should be natural, logic, and

simple. If a correct natural mapping is employed, there is no need for diagrams, labels or wordy instructions, see e.g. D.A. Norman in The Psychology of Everyday Things, Basic Books, 1988.

Thus, the present invention comprises a graphical user interface for monitoring and/or controlling of a computer controlled dairy farm system by a human user comprising a computer based graphical and schematic representation of said system, of a machine or part of a machine thereof, of a fence or a gate thereof, or of an animal, or part thereof, at the dairy farm, featuring that said representation is employing the principle of natural mapping.

In this respect said graphical and schematic representation comprises objects, each of which represents a respective part of said dairy farm system, or part thereof, and each having at least one associated physical property, wherein each said at least one physical property associated with the respective object is comprised among physical properties of the respective represented part of said dairy farm system, or part thereof.

Furthermore, each said at least one physical property which is comprised among the properties of the respective represented part of said dairy farm system, or part thereof, is preferably chosen from the group of spatial location, size, shape, color, direction, movement, amount, rate, frequency and distance from other objects.

Alternatively, a relation between a first and a second object of said representation is comprised among relations between a first and a second part of the dairy farm system, or part thereof, which are represented by said parts.

A few embodiments of the present invention will now be described in relation to a milking robot installation. They constitute different graphical user interfaces, or screen windows that all represent the robot, part thereof or gates used for the milking

activities, and/or the cow, or part thereof, in a graphical manner that eliminate, or at least reduce the probability of faulty conception by the user, by the employment of natural mappings.

A first embodiment of the present invention will now be described with reference to Fig. 1, which schematically illustrates a graphical user interface used for e.g. monitoring or controlling of a milking machine of the above depicted type during a particular phase of the milking denoted "Teat attach and Milking". Here, the four teats of the cow are represented graphically by four boxes, labeled "Start Milking", located relative each other as they do in reality, i.e. with a larger distance between the front teats than between the back teats. This is a fact well known to every single farmer, and hence the risk for making a mistake while identifying the teats for further handling such as milking, is minimized. When viewing the interface and the milking machine, respectively, from the same position, the cow and the graphical teat representation should preferably have their fronts facing towards the same direction, i.e. towards the right in the illustrated case. But in either case, the risk of making a mistake is severely reduced.

Furthermore, each teat representation has a respective status indication associated therewith, which indicates whether the teat is being milked or not. In Fig. 1 the representations show "Start milking" and the teats are thus not being milked. By activating the milking manually, e.g. by pressing the "Start milking" buttons, or whether it is performed automatically, the representations are starting to indicate the milk mass flow in real time. Next to each representation, there is a status indication of the milk yield (in grams), i.e. accumulated collected milk, from the respective teat during the milking.

The labels "left rear", "left front", "right rear" and "right front" are redundant information and may be removed, whereby only

the naturally mapped graphical representation of the teat formation is sufficient for identifying the respective teat. This is an example of a simple but excellent natural mapping.

Considering next Fig. 2 which illustrates a graphical user interface according a second embodiment of the present invention corresponding to an adjustment phase, i.e. for teat cup testing, of the milking machine. At this stage, the teat cups are located along a line in a magazine at one side of the milking machine. The interface has graphical representations of the teat cups in this location and the coupling between the respective positions, i.e. in its magazine and attached to teat, is shown by color-coding of the respective representations. Thus, there is a mapping between the teat cup in its magazine position and in its position during milking.

Alternatively, the coupling may be indicated by arrows or movement directions for how respective teat cup is moved during teat attachment and detachment, which may be activated automatically or by the user, e.g. by clicking, double clicking or movement through the so-called drag-and-drop technique of the respective graphical representation.

Considering next Fig. 3 which illustrates a graphical user interface according a third embodiment of the present invention corresponding to an other adjustment phase of the milking machine, i.e. a stall control, for adjusting of manger position, a rear plate, and entry and exit gates, respectively.

Here, the rear plate, i.e. a plate for collecting cow excrements, may be in either of two positions; in a "Pull Back" position wherein it is out of use and removed from the stall enabling the cow to enter the stall from left, i.e. through an entry gate, or in a "Release" position wherein it is positioned behind the cow, when the cow is in the stall, for collecting of excrements. The

rear plate is moved as indicated by the arrows, i.e. to the left when it is pulled back and to the right when it is released. The position of the manger is utilized for adjustment of the stall length to each individual cow. This is performed by variably position the manger, more to the left for shorter cows and more to the right for longer cows, as indicated by the scroll bars (and the arrows in the Figure). Finally, the entry and exit gates have push buttons for opening and closing. The gates are preferably opened from the far side of the user and closed from the close side, as indicated by the positions of the respective push buttons in the Figure.

Furthermore, the respective positions of the rear plate, the manger and the gates correspond to their positions in reality, i.e. with the rear plate and the entry gate to the left and the manger and the exit gate to the right (from the user's intended viewpoint).

A fourth embodiment of the present invention (not shown in the Figures) comprises a graphical user interface that shows an entire dairy farm in a perspicuous manner, with position indications for each individual cow, fence, gate and apparatus, and status indications such as if cows have been milked or not, if gates are opened or closed, and if apparatuses are in use or not.

Other machines or processes at a dairy farm may off course be equally suited for the implementation of a computer controlled, controlling and/or informing graphical user interface that makes use of the invention by employing natural mappings.

In summary several embodiments of the present invention have been disclosed, which illustrate the various characteristics of the present invention.

It will be obvious that the invention may be varied in a plurality of ways. Such variations are not to be regarded as a departure from the scope of the invention. All such modifications as would be obvious to one skilled in the art are intended to be included within the scope of the appended claims.

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CLAIMS

1. A graphical user interface for the monitoring and/or controlling of a computer controlled dairy farm system, or part thereof, by a human user, characterized in that it comprises a computer based graphical and schematic representation of said dairy farm system, or part thereof, where said representation comprises objects, each of which represents a respective part of said dairy farm system, or part thereof, and each having at least one associated physical property, wherein each said at least one physical property associated with the respective object is comprised among physical properties of the respective represented part of said dairy farm system, or part thereof.

2. The graphical user interface as claimed in Claim 1, characterized in that each said at least one physical property which is comprised among the properties of the respective represented part of said dairy farm system, or part thereof, is chosen from the group of spatial location, size, shape, color, direction, movement, amount, rate, frequency and distance from other objects.

3. The graphical user interface as claimed in Claim 1 or 2, characterized in that a relation between a first and a second object of said representation is comprised among relations between a first and a second part of the dairy farm system, or part thereof, which are represented by said objects.

4. The graphical user interface as claimed in any of Claims 1-3, characterized in that it comprises a schematic representation of an entire dairy farm system, in which case it comprises objects representing parts such as each individual cow, fence, gate or apparatus in the dairy farm system.

5. The graphical user interface as claimed in Claim 4, characterized in that it comprises schematic status indications for at least one of its objects such as for instance if a cow has been milked or not, if a gate is opened or closed, or if an apparatus is in use or not.

6. The graphical user interface as claimed in any of Claims 1-3, characterized in that it comprises a schematic representation of a milking machine, or part thereof, or of a cow, or part thereof.

7. The graphical user interface as claimed in Claim 6, characterized in that it comprises schematic representations of the teats of a cow, or teat cups that are attached to them, by four icons located schematically with a longer distance between the icons representing the front teats or teat cups and a shorter distance between the icons representing the back teats or teat cups.

8. The graphical user interface as claimed in Claim 7, characterized in that the schematic representations of the teats or teat cups are associated with respective controls for start milking or with respective status indications indicating milk yield during milking.

9. The graphical user interface as claimed in Claim 7 or 8, characterized in that it comprises schematic representations of the teat cups as detached at spatial locations, which schematically correspond to the respective spatial locations in the milking machine, e.g. along a line.

10. The graphical user interface as claimed in Claim 9, characterized in that each of the four icons schematically representing the teats of a cow, or teat cups that are attached to them, has a visual characteristic in common with

the respective associated schematic representation of the teat cup as detached, e.g. along a line, in order to map each detached teat cup to its respective attached position.

11. The graphical user interface as claimed in any of Claims 6-10, characterized in that it comprises schematic representations of an entry gate and of an exit gate, respectively, of said milking machine, at spatial locations corresponding schematically to the respective locations in the milking machine.

12. The graphical user interface as claimed in Claim 11, characterized in that the schematic representations of the entry gate and of the exit gate are associated with respective controls for opening and closing the respective gate or with respective status indications indicating whether the respective gate is opened or closed.

13. The graphical user interface as claimed in any of Claims 6-12, characterized in that it comprises schematic representations of a rear plate and of a manger, respectively, of said milking machine.

14. The graphical user interface as claimed in Claim 13, characterized in that the schematic representations of the rear plate and of the manger are associated with respective controls for positioning the rear plate and the manger or with respective status indications indicating the location of the rear plate and the manger.

15. An automatic milking machine, characterized in that it comprises a graphical user interface as claimed in any of claims 1-14.

16. A method for providing a graphical user interface for the monitoring and/or controlling of a computer-controlled dairy farm

system, or part thereof, by a human user, characterized by displaying a computer based graphical and schematic representation of said dairy farm system, or part thereof, where said representation comprises objects, each of which represents a respective part of said dairy farm system, or part thereof, and each having at least one associated physical property, wherein each said at least one physical property associated with the respective object is comprised among physical properties of the respective represented part of said dairy farm system, or part thereof.

17. The method as claimed in Claim 16, characterized by choosing each said at least one physical property which is comprised among the properties of the respective represented part of said dairy farm system, or part thereof, from the group of spatial location, size, shape, color, direction, movement, amount, rate, frequency and distance from other objects.

18. The method as claimed in Claim 17, characterized by displaying the computer based graphical and schematic representation of the dairy farm system, or part thereof, where a relation between a first and a second object of said representation is comprised among relations between a first and a second part of the dairy farm system, or part thereof, which are represented by said objects.

19. The method as claimed in any of Claims 16-18, characterized by displaying a schematic representation of a milking machine, or part thereof, or of a cow, or part thereof.

20. The method as claimed in Claim 19, characterized by displaying schematic representations of the teats of a cow, or teat cups that are attached to them, by four icons located schematically with a longer distance between the icons

representing the front teats or teat cups and a shorter distance between the icons representing the back teats or teat cups.

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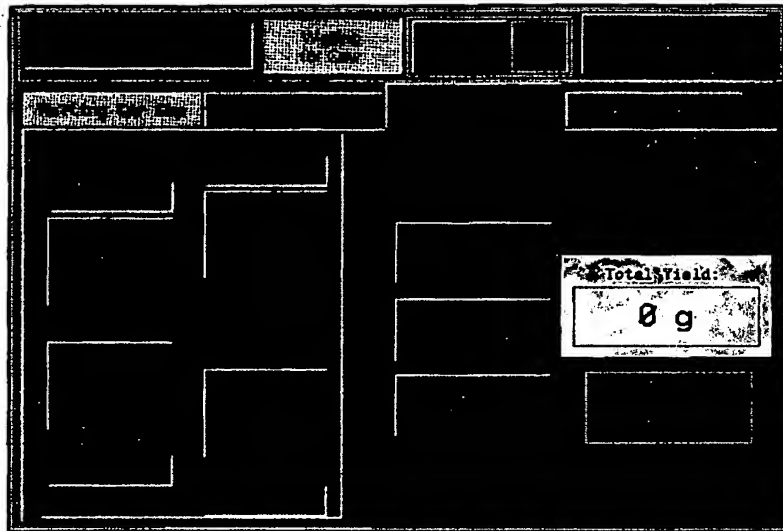


Fig. 1

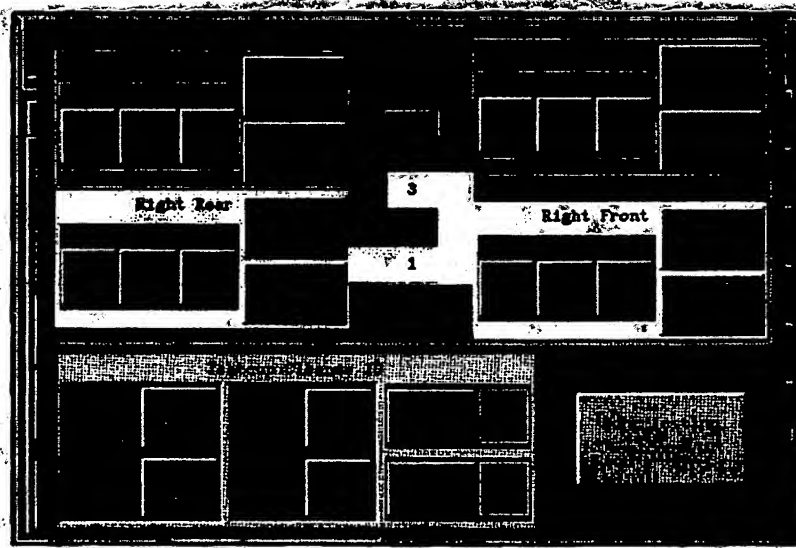
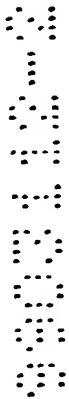


Fig. 2

ABSTRACT

A graphical user interface for the monitoring and/or controlling of a computer controlled dairy farm system, or part thereof, by a human user, is disclosed, which comprises a computer based graphical and schematic representation of said dairy farm system, or part thereof, where said representation comprises objects, each of which represents a respective part of said dairy farm system, or part thereof, and each having at least one associated physical property, wherein each said at least one physical property associated with the respective object is comprised among physical properties of the respective represented part of said dairy farm system, or part thereof. Each said at least one physical property which is comprised among the properties of the respective represented part of said dairy farm system, or part thereof, is preferably chosen from the group of spatial location, size, shape, color, direction, movement, amount, rate, frequency and distance from other objects.

(Fig. 1 suggested for publication)



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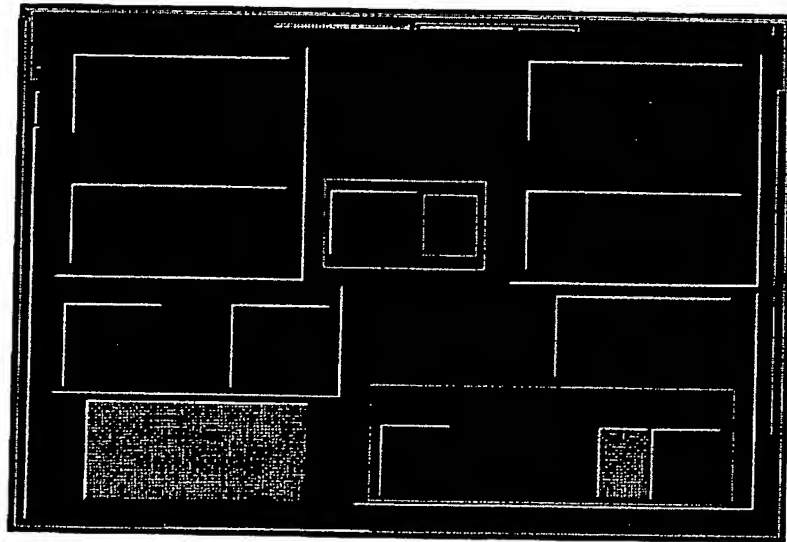


Fig. 3

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